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PEACE CORPS ASKS A REVIEW OF CUTS

Director Says She Asked Haig
to Help Out on Budget and
Found Him 'Supportive'

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WASHINGTON, Oct. 31 — The Peace Corps, with its modest \$105 million budget cut this year to \$83.6 million, has appealed to the Administration for reconsideration.

Loret Miller Ruppe, the organization's director, said yesterday in her office just before setting out on a month-long tour of volunteer outposts in North and West Africa, that she had met with Secretary of State Alexander M. Haig Jr. about the budgetary problem and had found him "very supportive."

"He said what we were doing was right in line with the Administration's foreign policy," she said. "But we haven't heard anything yet about our appeal."

The Peace Corps, now 20 years old, is very different from what it was in the 1960's. The average age of volunteers is higher — about 27. There are fewer of them — about 5,000 in 60 countries compared with 11,115 in 57 nations in 1967.

Fisheries an Important Program

Most important to the Peace Corps now is the development of programs in agriculture and alternative sources of energy. Jody Olsen, the regional director for North Africa, the Near East, Asia and the Pacific, said that among these programs, training in fisheries was one of the most important.

"This is bringing protein into areas where it is almost impossible to get meat," Miss Olsen said. She also described projects in teaching simple market gardening in primary and secondary schools and the raising of rabbits for food supply. Agriculture specialists are in great demand by the Corps.

In its training program, volunteers are taught not to expect to see changes in their two-year period of service.

"With rabbits, for example," Miss Olsen said, "it may be easier to raise rabbits than build fisheries, but you have to introduce the concept of eating rabbits, and of cooking rabbits. In some places that could take six to eight years."

The leadership of the Corps, struggling to live within the new financial restraints, is made up of loyal Republicans. Mrs. Ruppe, a Midwesterner, worked on Vice President Bush's campaign for the Presidency and went on to become cochairman of the Reagan-Bush committee in Michigan.

Virtues of Self-Help Extolled

She extols the virtues of self-help in public speeches, saying the work of the Corps is "right up Mr. Reagan's alley" in teaching self-sufficiency.

Lon Randall, a graduate of Fort Wayne Bible College and the president of Malone College in Canton, Ohio, who is now associate director for programs, prefaced remarks about the response of the Peace Corps to budget cuts with his support for "the President's move toward restoring sound fiscal policy."

In line with Administration moves in other agencies — notably the Agency for International Development, with which the Peace Corps works closely overseas — the Corps has created an office for liaison with the private sector. Its director is John Calvin Williams Jr., a former Peace Corps volunteer in Morocco and Niger who is on leave from Chase Manhattan Bank, where he directed activities in French-speaking Africa.

The Peace Corps offices are shared with several other volunteer agencies, including Volunteers in Service to America and the Foster Grandparent Program, all of which were combined by President Nixon in 1971 into a coordinating agency called Action.

Moves to Restore Independence

There have been moves in Congress to restore the independence of the Peace Corps, which many feel has lost its identity under the Action umbrella.

The movement was given new impetus in March, when President Reagan appointed Thomas W. Pauken director of Action. Mr. Pauken had served as a military intelligence officer in Vietnam, and the Peace Corps has a strict prohibition against former intelligence agents within its agency. Rumors of Central Intelligence Agency links to the Peace Corps, never proved, cost the Corps its India program, which was terminated by New Delhi in 1976.

Senator Alan Cranston of California led a successful Democratic drive to write Peace Corps autonomy into legislation this year. This month the full Senate upheld that legislation. Mrs. Ruppe says that the legislation was not necessary because she had been assured she would continue to report directly to the executive branch.

Evaluation Is Under Way

According to Mr. Randall, the associate director, the Peace Corps is in the process of "global evaluation" of its programs. Mr. Randall, who worked with the Agency for International Development in Thailand, said that, especially in a period of tight budget restraint, "the aim of the Peace Corps is to leave a country."

He said that as soon as a country's per capita income and quality of life had reached an acceptable level, the Peace Corps would disengage itself, as it has done recently in Chile, leaving the work in the hands of local officials and allowing the Corps to concentrate its resources on the "poorest of the poor."

The degree to which a country contributes to a Peace Corps presence has become important to whether the agency will agree to set up or expand programs. There are still many more requests for Peace Corps volunteers from foreign countries than the agency can hope to meet.